

# SUGGESTIONS for HOUSING WOMEN WAR WORKERS

Made to the Secretary of War by  
the Housing Committee of the  
Young Women's Christian Association

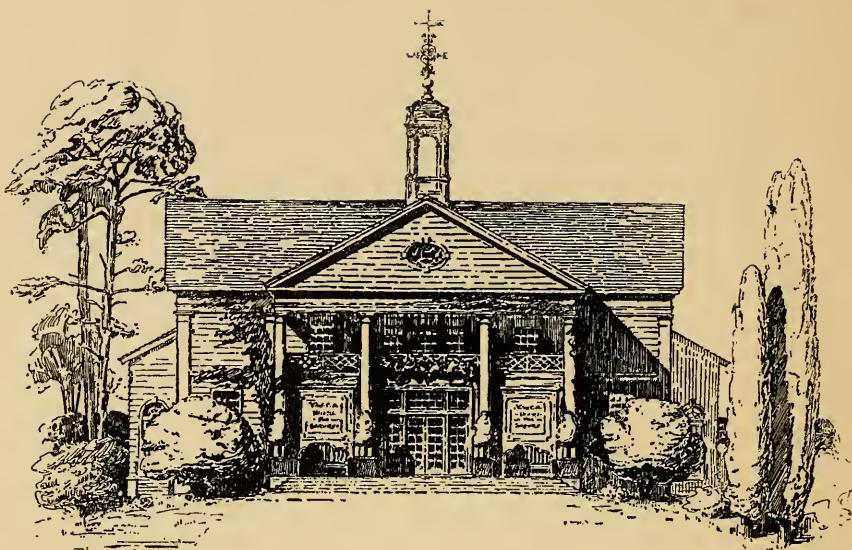
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*Recreation Building  
for Girl War Workers*

# Housing for Women in War Work

Report of the Housing Committee  
of the War Work Council, Young  
Women's Christian Association  
January, 1918

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## Housing for Girls in War Work

THE Housing Committee of the War Work Council of the Young Women's Christian Association, after an exhaustive investigation of the subject, has made definite suggestions to the Secretary of War and to Mr. Otto Eidritz, Chairman of the Housing Committee of the Council of National Defense, for housing women war workers in the United States.

The plans for the buildings suggested by the Young Women's Christian Association as practicable for housing women war workers were prepared by Mr. Duncan Candler of New York, who very kindly contributed his services.

These buildings have been designed to make them of permanent value. If they cease to be needed for women they can be adapted to family use.

The following report of the Housing Committee, as presented to the Secretary of War, is being sent to manufacturers throughout the United States.

\* \* \*

THE housing of women workers in connection with our great industrial establishments is not a new problem created by the war. It has been of growing seriousness for a number of years. The calling of many women workers to war service makes this situation immediately acute.

Obviously the providing of proper housing for these newly called women workers, since it is a part of the war

program, must be done by the Government. The Young Women's Christian Association, at its own expense, is prepared to construct one building as a demonstration. This building is now under construction at Charleston, South Carolina. If the Government shall decide to make provision for the housing of its women workers, the Young Women's Christian Association offers to provide the needed social and recreational workers.

**T**HE Young Women's Christian Association has been housing girls to some extent since its beginning more than fifty years ago. At the present time there are two hundred homes in the United States belonging to and managed by the Association.

Because of our experience in the past with this question we believe that the failures in boarding homes have been due to unattractive houses unfortunately located from the point of view of the girl's work and social life, to groups too large for adequate management and supervision, and more often than anything else, to the lack of proper leadership and supervision in the house.

It is not sufficient to provide a working matron, no matter how excellent her knowledge of housekeeping. There must be a social head of the house, a woman of tact and experience, who can get and hold the respect of the girls, take the leadership of their social life, and maintain proper standards within the house. It is here that the Young Women's Christian Association can be of service.

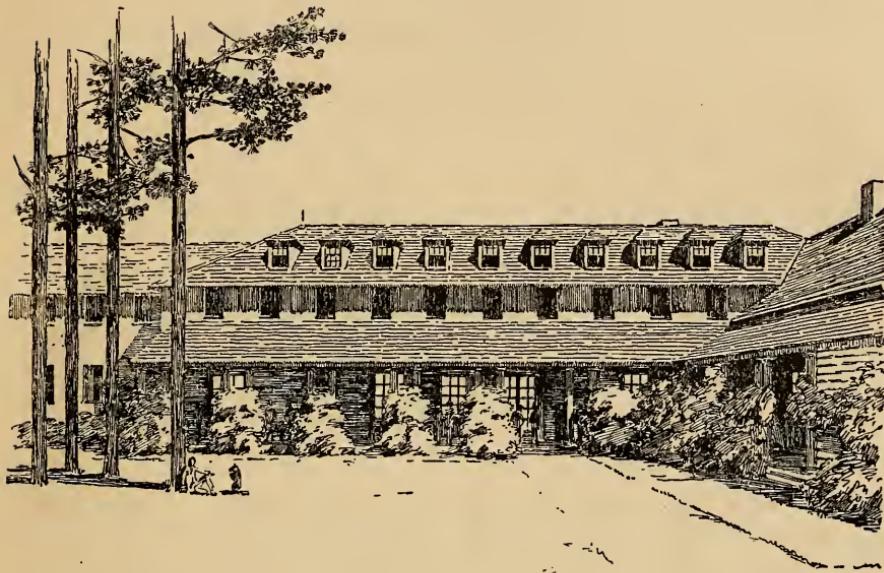
#### **How Girls Should Be Grouped**

1. Younger girls should live in groups where they can have social life and an opportunity to entertain their friends, but still be under some of the restrictions of the home.

2. Older women want independence of living. Many of them object to living in large groups because of the noise and confusion and ensuing fatigue.

3. In every case, colored girls and women should live by themselves, and provision should be made for their social life.

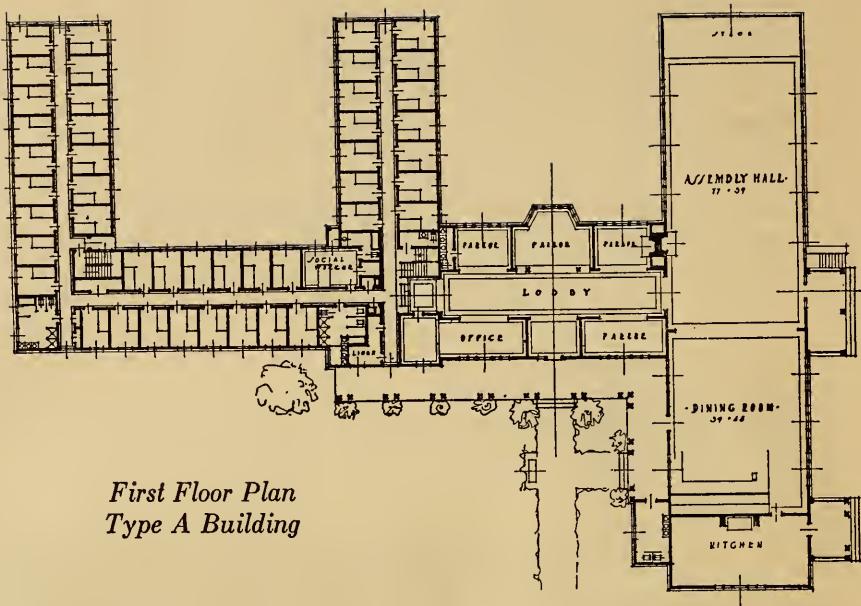
4. It has been found that it is more successful to house the non-English speaking foreign girls in small groups, until they learn English and become used to American customs. A social worker should be employed to work with them.



*Type A Building*

**T**YPE A Building, the permanent structure that the Y. W. C. A. is building as a demonstration in Charleston for girls working in the naval uniform factory, is designed for use in places where only one building will be erected. It includes not only living and dining rooms, but also recreational facilities. There are adequate fire escapes outside the building as well as two fire walls inside.

The dining room and recreation hall, several parlors, and bedrooms for forty-four girls are on the first floor.



*First Floor Plan  
Type A Building*

There is but one entrance for the residents. This makes it possible for the matron or social head of the house, who is in the office near the door, to see every one who comes in or goes out.

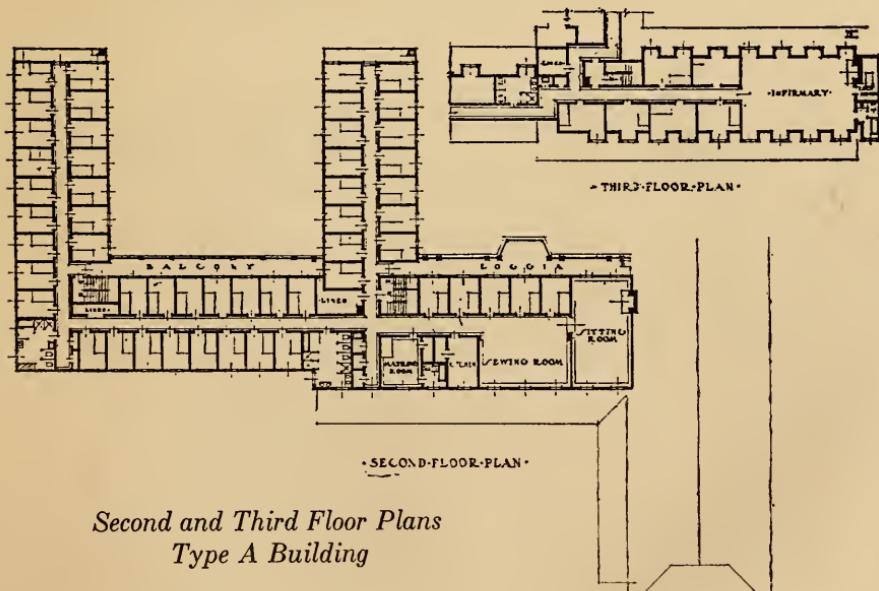
The entrance hall is attractive and homelike. Opening out of it are several parlors separated from the hall by arches. To the right is an entrance to the wing containing the recreation hall and dining room. These rooms are so arranged that they can be thrown into one for a large social gathering.

The dining room is reached also by an entrance from the porch outside. This makes it possible for people to go to lunch in the cafeteria without passing through the house. There is a lavatory with wash bowls and toilets adjacent to the dining room, giving an opportunity to the girls, who come directly from work, to wash their hands before eating. This is important both from the point of view of cleanliness, and for the sake of the girls' health.

The dining room is arranged with a serving table at one end, that can be used for cafeteria service at noon if desired. For the other two meals a set menu should be provided, as the girls choose very unwisely if left to themselves.

The recreation hall has windows on three sides with a set stage at one end. There is a fireplace in the side wall. This room can be used for a gymnasium and for social parties. It can also be arranged in such a way that several classes can be held at the same time in different parts of the room.

**I**N order to get to the sleeping rooms on the first floor it is necessary to pass the office. Next to the office is a room with a private bath for the head of the house. The bedrooms are all single, 8 feet by 12 feet. Each room has a single bed, dresser, chairs and table, and closet. Single rooms not only give the privacy and quiet

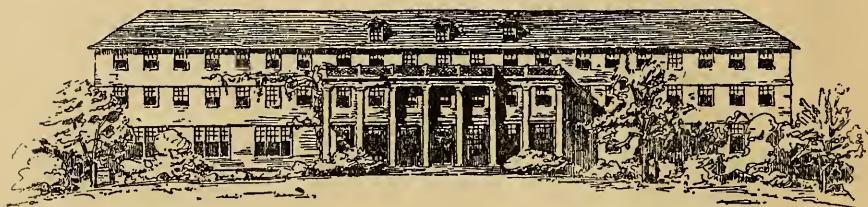


*Second and Third Floor Plans  
Type A Building*

which girls working hard every day need, but also make the management of the house much easier.

There are bedrooms for fifty-one girls on the second floor. There is also a sitting room separated from the hall only by pillars. This is for the use of the girls only. Next to this is a small sewing room with facilities for sewing.

Toilets, wash bowls and bath are grouped on each floor. There is one toilet to every ten girls, one wash bowl to every six girls, and one shower to every ten girls. There is at least one tub on each floor. Shower baths are more sanitary than tubs and there is much less difficulty in



*Type B Building*

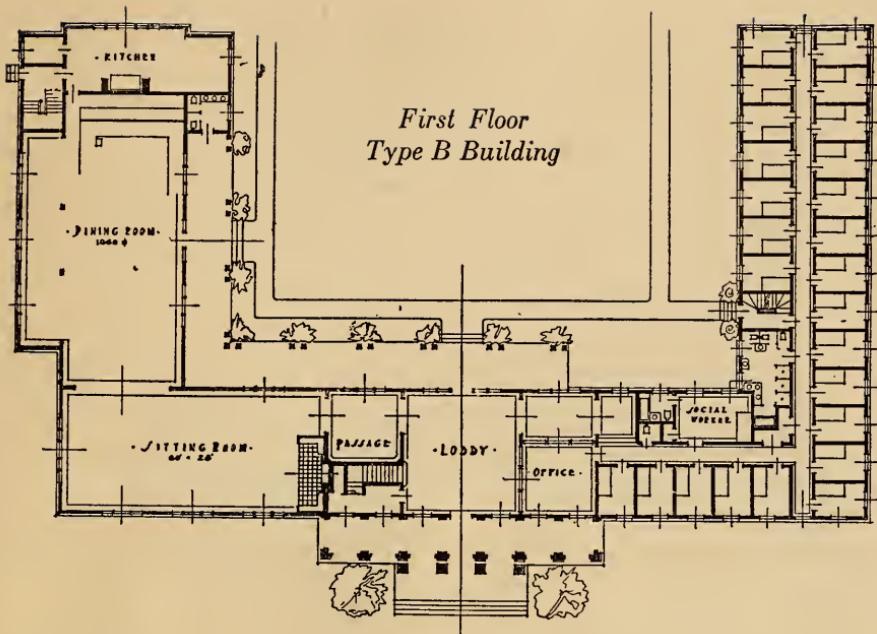
taking care of them. They should be body showers. Each toilet, shower and tub is in a separate compartment.

On each floor is a slop sink, a closet for brooms and pails and one or more linen closets.

There is also on this floor a kitchenette with a gas plate, sink and cupboard for the use of the girls.

A place should be provided either on this floor or in the basement where girls can do as much of their laundry work as they wish. This laundry should have several set tubs, a drying closet, irons, ironing board and a gas plate.

There are bedrooms for six girls on the third floor. There is also an infirmary and a private bath. This room has a cross draft and is in the quietest part of the house. There is a storage place for trunks on this floor.



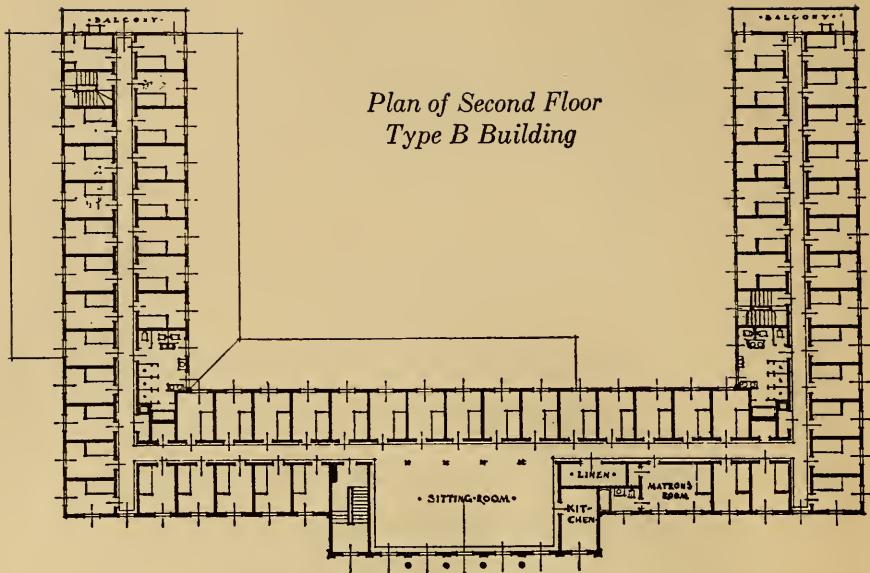
The recreation and dining room wing of the house is one story high. All sleeping rooms are removed from noise and confusion.

TYPE B Building is designed for 150 girls. It is planned to be a unit of a group in an industrial community. The building is three stories high with adequate fire escapes.

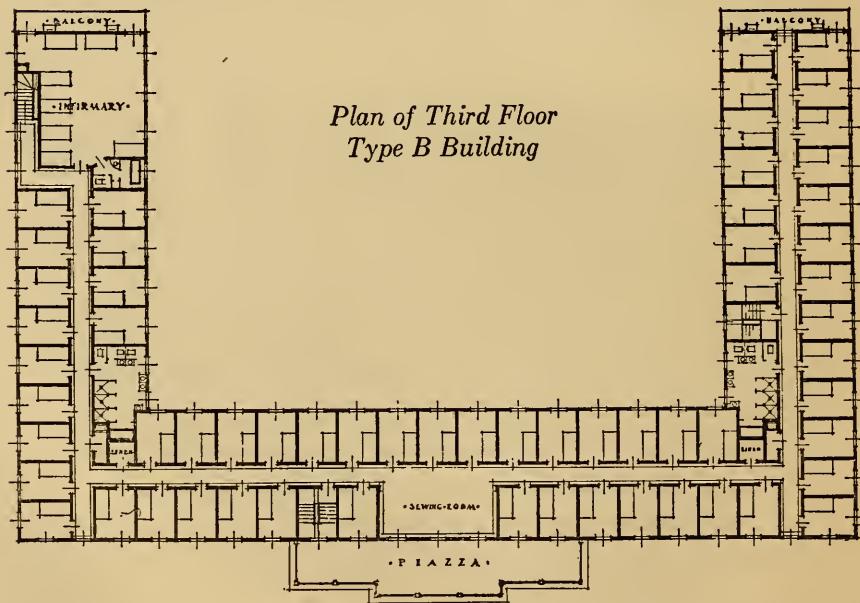
The entrance is attractive and homelike, with the office on one side. At the left is a large living room, the furniture of which can be arranged to permit privacy in conversation. The girls have an opportunity to receive their friends here in attractive surroundings.

The arrangement of the second floor of Type B is the same as in Type A.

The third floor is the same as the second floor, except that the end of one wing is used for an infirmary with seven or eight beds.



*Plan of Second Floor  
Type B Building*



*Plan of Third Floor  
Type B Building*

THE kitchen in both Type A and Type B should have ranges placed back to back on a cement foundation and covered by a hood pierced by flues. The cement foundation should extend at least two feet in front of the range on each side and be covered with a wooden rack for the employees to stand on. The working tables should be of hardwood with steel tube ball base legs and wooden top bound with steel with drawers and shelves underneath. They should be placed six feet from the range. A rack and hooks for holding cooking utensils should extend over the entire length of the working table at the end of which there should be a small sink and running water.

The refrigerator should be so placed that it can be filled from the outside. If possible there should be a double battery of refrigerators, back to back.

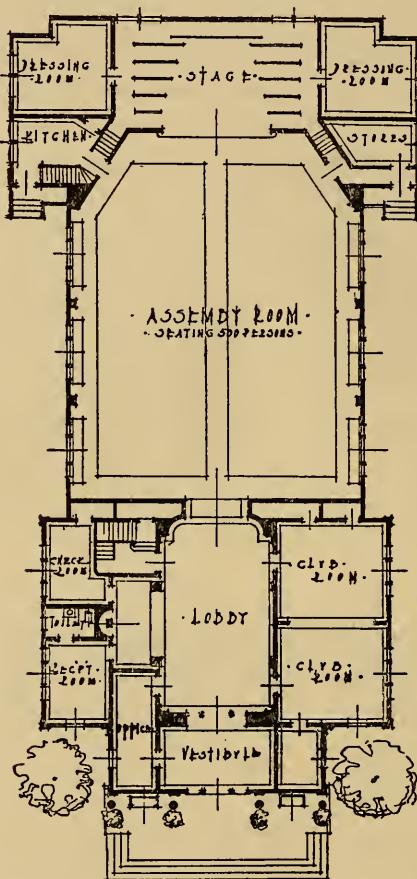
Sinks should be placed to get direct daylight, and should be at least thirty-eight inches high with wooden or galvanized iron drainboards attached with sufficient pitch toward the sink to be effective.

TOO much emphasis cannot be placed on recreation. No matter how comfortable and attractive the living quarters may be, the girls will not be happy and contented unless there is adequate provision for social and recreational life.

The Recreation Building, planned to be the central building for a number of units of sleeping and eating quarters, contains a large assembly room that will hold about five hundred persons.

There is a built-in stage at one end with dressing rooms on either side. There is also a small kitchenette which can be used for serving light refreshments at parties. Under the stage is a storage place for chairs, so that the floor can be cleared and used for dancing

and other group games. A small office and space for checking coats is near the entrance. There is a small reception room back of the assembly hall. There are six



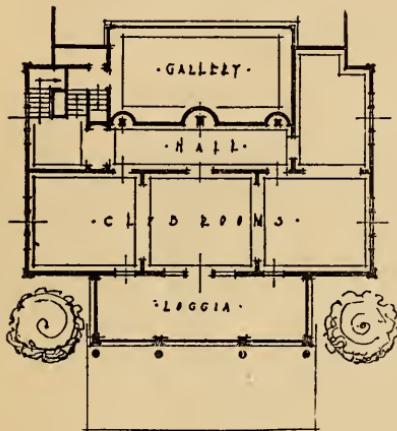
*Plan of First Floor  
Recreation Building*

club rooms, four of which are on the mezzanine floor.

Where so many girls are living together in groups there is unusual opportunity for educational work of all kinds.

This gives an opportunity also to make American citizens out of foreign girls, to teach them English and to give them the same advantages that the men of their families are getting in the camps.

In industrial communities the buildings should be grouped as effectively as possible with due regard to natural advantages. There can, of course, be as many units as are necessary. There should also be a number of three and four-family houses to accommodate the older women and the non-English speaking foreign girls.

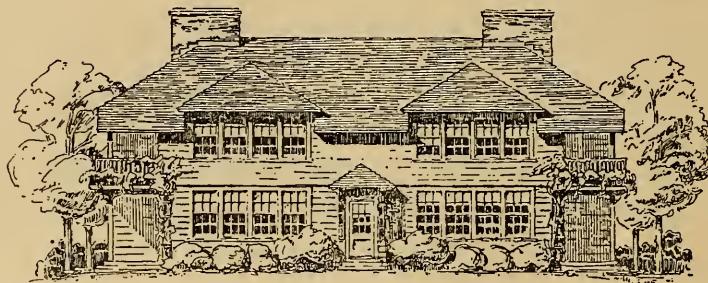


*Plan of Second Floor  
Recreation Building*

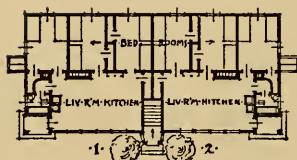
If possible the recreation building should be on higher ground than the rest. In all of these buildings an attempt has been made to use a style of architecture which is distinctively American.

**T**YPE C, the four-family house, is designed for the use of four groups, either of older women who wish to live independently, or of non-English speaking foreign girls.

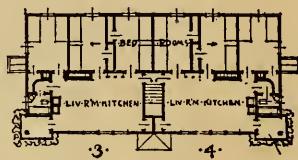
Each apartment has a bath room, a large combination kitchen and living room and three bedrooms. Each bedroom is large enough for two people. The groups of



ENTRANCE-ELEVATION



FIRST-FLOOR-PLAN



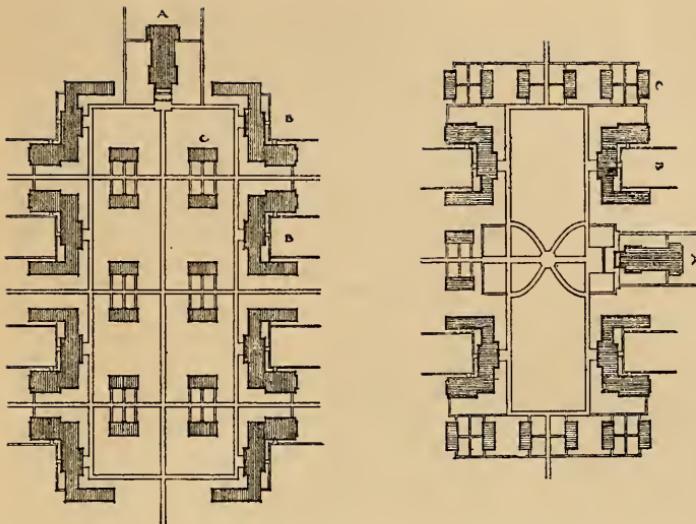
SECOND-FLOOR-PLAN

*Type C  
The Four-Family House  
Second and Third Floor Plans*

people in these houses live independently, providing for their own meals and housekeeping.

### Size of Units

**B**UILDING units of not more than 150 girls are most successful. Larger units mean greater difficulties of management and supervision. The minimum number of a group should not be less than seventy-five. Houses holding less than this number cannot be self-



*Suggestions for Groups of Buildings*

supporting on the amount of board that the girls can and should pay. It is essential that these houses be completely self-supporting.

In presenting the suggestions and plans, it is done with the realization that the buildings must be adapted to suit the peculiar conditions of various communities.

\* \* \*

**T**HE following are the letters addressed to the Secretary of War, and to Mr. Otto Eidritz, Chairman of the Committee on Housing, to accompany the Young Women's Christian Association's report on housing for girls.

The Secretary of War,

Washington, D. C.

Mr. Secretary:

We are coming before you today, Miss Maud Miner, representing the Committee for the Protection of Girls; Dr. Katherine B. Davis, of the Bureau of Social Hygiene; Miss Mary Sims, one of the executive secretaries of the National

Board of the Young Women's Christian Association, and myself, Chairman of the Housing Committee of the Young Women's Christian Association, to lay before you the question of women working in or about the camps, and also that of housing the women employed in industry, particularly those industries pertaining to the operations of war.

In view of the probability that an increasing number of women must necessarily be employed in war activities in connection with camps, it is strongly recommended that these women be placed on a war basis, enlisting for war service under military discipline. Such control would do away with many objectionable features of such service at the present time.

We beg that the Government, recognizing its responsibility to these girls, build for them houses where they may eat and sleep and be provided with proper oversight as well as opportunities for recreation, none of which are at present available. If it is the wish of the War Department, the Young Women's Christian Association will undertake to furnish leadership for the social and recreational life of these girls.

This same need which exists among women employed in connection with the camps is as great among the women employed in factories making war supplies.

We are, therefore, submitting to Mr. Eidritz, of the Committee on Housing of the Council of National Defense, a carefully worked out set of plans for the housing of women. The Young Women's Christian Association, which we represent, is building a house at Charleston, South Carolina, as a demonstration, but it is obviously impossible for it to undertake to build these houses for girls all over the country. In submitting these plans to you and to Mr. Eidritz, we cannot too strongly urge that they be accepted as a standard for the future housing of women workers.

For the past fifty years one of the chief activities of the Young Women's Christian Association has been the providing of proper living conditions for young women, and we have drawn upon this long experience for the formulation of these plans. The unit which we recommend provides for the girls' individual privacy, proper bathing, social and eating facilities. Such surroundings will help to maintain and improve their health and to make them more efficient workers.

On the moral side, they will be given supervised recreation, pleasant surroundings and an opportunity to see their men friends.

These buildings also provide an opportunity for instruction, as there are rooms where the girls can be taught such things as First Aid, sewing, English and such other subjects as they may desire. The educational value of such housing is unlimited. Most employers of women prefer girls from

the country who are strong and vigorous. These unsophisticated but able girls frequently become dissatisfied and unfit in the crowded, sordid conditions in which too often they have to live in most industrial communities.

When England adopted a somewhat similar plan of housing she found that she had helped to solve the labor problem, and in the munition factories where they are housed in small groups there is no question of restless, dissatisfied employees, and the production of those factories is greatly increased.

This is not simply a war problem, but has been one of the most pressing and acute questions for all working women for many years past, and if something is done now to ameliorate these conditions, it will be a contribution to the future solution of this most difficult problem. The women of these various committees here represented stand ready to aid in the selection of women to administer these buildings. For these positions should be chosen trained women of high ideals, with love and sympathetic understanding of girls.

Therefore, Mr. Secretary, we beg that you lend the power of your office and your personal influence to this undertaking.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Abby A. Rockefeller

(Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.)

*Chairman of Housing Committee*

Mr. Otto Eidlitz,  
Chairman of the Committee on Housing,  
Washington, D. C.

Mr. Eidlitz:

The Housing Committee of the Young Women's Christian Association after much study and thought have made these plans which we are now giving you. They represent the fruit of the many years of experience of the Young Women's Christian Association and embody not only their ideas but their ideals.

In coming to you, we urge that these plans be made the standard, and that when the Government assists any corporation in building houses for their workers, it require that these standards be maintained for housing women workers. The question of housing for men is quite different from that of housing for women, more so perhaps than most people realize.

Experience has proved that girls do not like nor is it wise for them to be housed in large units. Proper supervision is not possible, as the social and moral difficulties are so great;

therefore we have set 150 as the maximum number in a house. While with the economic side, very much in mind we have set a minimum of 75, again it has been found that a building housing less than 75 cannot be self-supporting, which we strongly believe should be regarded as essential. In such units it is possible to give girls the protection of home and many of its advantages, at the same time leaving them independent and self-respecting.

If the Committee on Housing of the National Council of Defense will adopt these standards of living for women, they will render a service to the women of this country the value of which it is impossible to measure.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Abby A. Rockefeller

(Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.)

*Chairman of Housing Committee*



